



## Why Is Collaboration Important: The Benefits and the Pitfalls

---

There are tangible and intangible benefits to nurturing a collaborative culture within an organization. Collaboration enhances organizational performance and creates an environment that encourages consistent improvement to products and services and increases organizational knowledge.

Providing products or services is ultimately about people and how well they work together, removing friction from the product or service experience, and delivering value to customers.

Knowledge is attained over time and through experience, and learning happens as work gets done.

In a non-collaborative environment, a great deal of knowledge sharing and conversational information exchange unfortunately goes unrecorded. Collaboration enables the automatic capture and distribution of knowledge for the benefit of the entire community, at zero cost, as a by-product of getting work done.

This enhances, streamlines, and optimizes work, as knowledge accumulates during the flow of information between individuals, teams, and departments. Here are some of the advantages of implementing collaboration that you can bring to your organization:

---

## Process Improvement

There is no better way to improve operational processes than by enabling the right people to develop, evolve and refine them. When a process can be improved people are generally vocal, and by embracing collaborative working, good ideas can be quickly put into practice.

---

## Intellectual Capital

Although formal training is essential, most organizational learning is achieved by 'doing.' Building know-how and skills is imperative to stay ahead of the competition, and the best way to build knowledge is by continuously – and automatically – keeping your people up-to-speed. It is also vital that intellectual capital and know-how does not disappear when employees leave. By encouraging the free flow of information on a suitable platform, knowledge can be retained and structured in an organized format. This makes it searchable for future use, enabling new employees to get up-to-speed quickly.

---

## Human Capital

Staff who feel listened to, kept well informed, and understand the purpose and challenges of the organization, are an engaged and happy workforce. This means lower staff turnover, reduced recruitment costs and, ultimately, happy customers and consumers.

---

## Communication Improvement

Two remarkable dynamics occur in collaborative environments which change the way an organisation uses its time and resources. First, people are better informed before going to meetings, which are generally shorter and are needed less frequently. Second, the need for leadership to communicate progress, news, and status information continuously is reduced substantially.

---

## Appetite for Educated Risk

Traditional hierarchical organizations typically discourage failure, but developments in the digital age are so fast that learning by experimenting is becoming the norm. In a true collaborative culture, the organization will benefit from an appetite for educated risk. Of course, there must be a balance between successes and failures. Leadership will have to give the organization focus and provide direction.

---

Collaboration shouldn't be seen as a replacement for any best practice. Instead, view collaboration as a set of foundational cultural behaviours that empowers teams to adopt, adapt, and improve in an effective fashion. Now let's consider some of the potential pitfalls of collaboration and how to avoid them:

---

---

## Anti-collaborators

Not everyone likes to collaborate. Anti-collaborators not only avoid collaborating, they subconsciously prevent others from doing so, by moving conversations that should be on a workspace into meetings. This comes at a cost, because they are closing the door to contribution from others and failing to create reusable knowledge by refusing to use a communication platform that is designed to capture those conversations. You will undoubtedly find anti-collaborators within your organization but be aware that too much of this behaviour can undermine your collaborative culture.

## Toxic Conversations

---

Because of the open nature of conversations, this is mostly self-regulating, but heated conversations will arise from time to time. The last thing you want is a toxic conversation with no conclusion because the resolution was taken offline. Ideally they should always be resolved in the same forum.

## Non-collaborating Teams

---

This behaviour is common amongst teams that do not want anyone to interfere with their working practices, activities, and ideas. They may perceive suggestions as criticism or think that other people have no right to tell them how to do their jobs. The good news is that in an organization where most teams are collaborating, those that are not will quickly start to feel isolated. Their lack of contribution becomes highly visible, so this situation is usually self-correcting.

## Unwanted Contributions

---

This tends to be a later stage effect, which only starts to become an issue when collaborative behaviors have been institutionalized and everyone has become used to working openly and transparently. People post their ideas, invite others to comment, value their feedback and overall contribution to the outcome. Inviting commentary and feedback too early in the conversation however can be obstructive. Product development is a prime example, where ideation around new or enhanced features is likely to invite feedback, questions, and suggestions. This can be time-consuming to manage, especially if people are not aware of the full picture. People's contributions can be incredibly valuable, but remember that if multiple teams are brought into the conversation too early, it can be counterproductive.

## Distracted by 'The Exciting Stuff'

---

Collaboration creates the opportunity to expose and involve more people in the new and exciting things the organization is doing. You must watch out for the tendency for people to be unproductively distracted by exciting stuff, to the point where it affects their ability to focus on the mundane, but critical things that must be done for the organization to function. Keep this in check through clear objectives, and by recognizing and rewarding people for good efforts on business-as-usual activities.

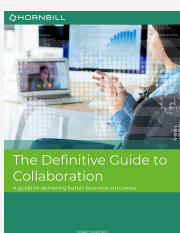
## Anarchy Mistaken for Collaborative Culture

---

In some business cultures, peer-to-peer relationships are often considered to be more effective than hierarchical relationships. This often works very well but there is a risk that collaboration without direction degenerates into anarchy. Effective collaboration requires strong governance and principles that respect the local business culture.

---

If you would like a deeper dive into the advantages and potential issues of bringing collaboration into your organization, we recommend you read the [collaboration e-book](#) recently published by our founder and CEO Gerry Sweeny [30 mins].



[Learn more](#)

### THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO COLLABORATION E-BOOK

A guide to delivering better business outcomes.

[Download now](#)